

**Telephone Remarks to the South
Boston Saint Patrick's Day Breakfast**
March 21, 2004

The President. Senator, this would be your President calling.

State Senator Jack Hart. President Bush, President Bush is on the line. How about a nice round of applause for President Bush? Happy Saint Patrick's Day. What an honor.

The President. Yes, same to you, Jack. Thanks for letting me call in. I appreciate you taking my call.

Senator Hart. Any time, Mr. President, we'll take your call any time, for crying out loud.

The President. Well, I'm proud of that. Listen, I want to thank Father Casey. I presume he's got quite a few souls to save there in that crowd. [*Laughter*]

Senator Hart. There's quite a few Democratic souls to save in this hall, Mr. President.

The President. I know you've got one—you invited at least one Republican, and that's my friend the Governor.

Senator Hart. Yes, yes, he's here. Mitt Romney is here. We were going to ask you, Mr. President, do you need a running mate? [*Laughter*]

The President. Wait a minute.

Senator Hart. We like Dick Cheney and all, but we'd like for you to take the Governor to Washington, DC. [*Laughter*]

The President. Look, you're lucky to have the guy. Here's the way I like to put it about Massachusetts: I know there's a lot of talk about a Massachusetts politician who has his eye on the Presidency. But tell Mitt it's not open until 2008. [*Laughter*]

Senator Hart. Oh, you're talking about—you had me stumped for a second there. You're talking about Senator Kerry, of course.

The President. Oh, no, no.

Senator Hart. Oh, my goodness.

The President. You mean the—well, never mind. [*Laughter*]

I want to thank the Lieutenant Governor. I want to thank the speaker and the senate president. I miss my days as being the Governor. I loved dealing with our Lieutenant Governor and speaker and members of the statehouse and the State senate. And I wish

you all the very best. I know you're struggling with some big issues. But these are good, decent folks working for the people of Massachusetts to get some things done, and I appreciate, Jack, the spirit of this lunch.

Senator Hart. Well, thank you very much. We are certainly honored that you called, and we respect the job that you're doing. We pray for you every day, Mr. President. You're a good man, and we just wanted to wish you a very, very happy Saint Patrick's Day.

The President. Same to you, sir, and I wish everybody a happy Saint Patrick's Day as well. God bless, everybody. God bless our great Nation.

NOTE: The President spoke at 10:25 a.m. from the Residence at the White House to breakfast participants meeting in Boston, MA. In his remarks, he referred to Rev. Robert E. Casey, pastor, Saint Brigid's Catholic Church, Boston, MA; Gov. Mitt Romney and Lt. Gov. Kerry Healey of Massachusetts; Thomas M. Finnerman, speaker, Massachusetts State house of representatives; and Robert E. Travaglini, president, Massachusetts State senate.

**Letter to Congressional Leaders
Transmitting a Consolidated Report
on the Deployment of United States
Combat-Equipped Armed Forces**
March 20, 2004

Dear Mr. Speaker: (Dear Mr. President:)

In the interests of improving the efficiency of the reporting process and to increase the utility of reports to the Congress, consistent with the War Powers Resolution, I have decided to consolidate supplemental reports I provide to the Congress regarding the deployment of U.S. combat-equipped armed forces in a number of locations around the world. This consolidated report is part of my efforts to keep the Congress informed about such deployments and covers operations in support of the global war on terrorism (including in Afghanistan), Kosovo, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Haiti. Operations in Iraq are a critical part of the war on terror, and it is my intention to continue to provide, consistent with the War Powers Resolution, information regarding the deployment of U.S. forces in Iraq in the reports to the Congress

under Public Law 107-243 and Public Law 102-1, as amended.

The Global War on Terrorism

Since September 24, 2001, I have reported, consistent with Public Law 107-40 and the War Powers Resolution, on the combat operations in Afghanistan against al-Qaida terrorists and their Taliban supporters, which began on October 7, 2001, and the deployment of various combat-equipped and combat-support forces to a number of locations in the Central, Pacific, and Southern Command areas of operation in support of those operations and of other operations in our global war on terrorism.

United States efforts in the campaign in Afghanistan continue to meet with success, but as I have stated in my previous reports, the U.S. war on terror will be lengthy. United States Armed Forces, with the assistance of numerous coalition partners, continue to conduct the U.S. campaign to eliminate the primary source of support to the terrorists who viciously attacked our Nation on September 11, 2001. These operations have been successful in seriously degrading al-Qaida's training capability and virtually eliminating the Taliban's ability to brutalize the Afghan people and to harbor and support terrorists. Pockets of al-Qaida and Taliban forces, however, remain a threat to U.S. and Coalition forces and to the Afghan government and Afghan people. United States, Coalition, and Afghan forces are actively pursuing and engaging remnant Taliban and al-Qaida fighters.

The United States continues to detain several hundred al-Qaida and Taliban fighters who are believed to pose a continuing threat to the United States and its interests. The combat-equipped and combat-support forces deployed to Naval Base, Guantanamo Bay,

Cuba, in the U.S. Southern Command area of operations since January 2002, continue to conduct secure detention operations for the approximately 610 enemy combatants at Guantanamo Bay.

In furtherance of the U.S. worldwide efforts against terrorists who pose a continuing and imminent threat to the United States, our friends and allies, and our forces abroad, the United States continues to work with

friends and allies in areas around the globe. For example, combat-equipped and combat-support forces deployed to Georgia to assist in training and equipping the Georgian government's forces will be completing their task in May 2004. United States combat-equipped and combat-support forces are also located in Djibouti. The U.S. forces headquarters element in Djibouti provides command and control support as necessary for military operations against al-Qaida and other international terrorists in the Horn of Africa region, including Yemen. These forces also assist in enhancing counterterrorism capabilities in Kenya, Ethiopia, Yemen, Eritrea, and Djibouti. The United States is engaged in a continuous process of assessing options for working with other nations to assist them in this respect.

Additionally, the United States continues to conduct maritime interception operations on the high seas in the U.S. Central, European, and Pacific Command areas of responsibility. These maritime operations have recently expanded into the U.S. Southern and Northern Command areas of responsibility to stop the movement, arming, or financing of international terrorists.

It is not possible to know at this time either the duration of combat operations or the scope and duration of the deployment of U.S. Armed Forces necessary to counter the terrorist threat to the United States. I will direct additional measures as necessary in the exercise of the U.S. right to self-defense and to protect U.S. citizens and interests. Such measures may include short-notice deployments of special operations and other forces for sensitive operations in various locations throughout the world.

NATO-Led Kosovo Force (KFOR)

As noted in previous reports regarding U.S. contributions in support of peace-keeping efforts in Kosovo, most recently on November 14, 2003, the U.N. Security Council authorized member states to establish KFOR in U.N. Security Council Resolution 1244 of June 10, 1999. The mission of KFOR is to provide an international security presence in order to deter renewed hostilities; verify, and, if necessary, enforce the terms

of the Military Technical Agreement between NATO and the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (which is now Serbia and Montenegro); enforce the terms of the Undertaking on Demilitarization and Transformation of the former Kosovo Liberation Army; provide day-to-day operational direction to the Kosovo Protection Corps; and maintain a safe and secure environment to facilitate the work of the U.N. Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK).

Currently, there are 18 NATO nations contributing to KFOR in addition to the 18 non-NATO nations that provide forces. The U.S. contribution to KFOR in Kosovo is about 1,900 U.S. military personnel, or approximately 11 percent of KFOR's total strength of approximately 17,500 personnel. Additionally, U.S. military personnel occasionally operate from Macedonia, Albania, and Greece in support of KFOR operations. Eighteen non-NATO contributing countries also participate with NATO forces in providing military personnel and other support personnel to KFOR.

The U.S. forces have been assigned to a sector principally centered around Gnjilane in the eastern region of Kosovo. For U.S. KFOR forces, as for KFOR generally, maintaining a safe and secure environment remains the primary military task. The KFOR operates under NATO command and control and rules of engagement. The KFOR coordinates with and supports UNMIK at most levels, provides a security presence in towns, villages, and the countryside, and organizes checkpoints and patrols in key areas to provide security, protect minorities, resolve disputes, and help instill in the community a feeling of confidence. By the end of 2003, UNMIK had transferred all non-reserved competencies under the Constitutional Framework document to the Kosovar Provisional Institutions of Self-Government (PISG). The PISG includes the President, Prime Minister, and Kosovo Assembly, and has been in place since March 2002.

NATO continues formally to review KFOR's mission at 6-month intervals. These reviews provide a basis for assessing current force levels, future requirements, force structure, force reductions, and the eventual withdrawal of KFOR. NATO has adopted the

Joint Operations Area plan to regionalize and rationalize its force structure in the Balkans. The KFOR has transferred full responsibility for public safety and policing to the UNMIK international and local police forces throughout Kosovo except in the area of Mitrovica, where the responsibility is shared due to security concerns. The UNMIK international police and local police forces have also begun to assume responsibility for guarding patrimonial sites and established border-crossing checkpoints.

NATO-Led Stabilization Force in Bosnia and Herzegovina (SFOR)

As noted in previous reports regarding U.S. contributions in support of peace-keeping efforts in the former Yugoslavia, most recently on January 22, 2004, the U.N. Security Council authorized member states to continue SFOR for a period of 12 months in U.N. Security Council Resolution 1491 of July 11, 2003. The mission of SFOR is to provide a focused military presence in order to deter hostilities, stabilize and consolidate the peace in Bosnia and Herzegovina, contribute to a secure environment, and perform key supporting tasks including support to the international civil presence in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

The U.S. force contribution to SFOR in Bosnia and Herzegovina is about 1,100 personnel. United States personnel comprise approximately 9 percent of the approximately 12,000 personnel assigned to SFOR. NATO has agreed to reduce the size of the force to 7,000 personnel by June 2004. United States participation is expected to be reduced proportionately. Currently, 16 NATO nations and 11 others provide military personnel or other support to SFOR. Most U.S. forces in Bosnia and Herzegovina are assigned to Multinational Brigade, North, headquartered near the city of Tuzla. The U.S. forces continue to support SFOR efforts to apprehend persons indicted for war crimes and to conduct counterterrorism operations.

Multinational Interim Force in Haiti

As I reported on February 25 and March 2, 2004, the United States deployed combat-equipped and combat-support personnel to

Haiti in order to secure key facilities, facilitate the continued repatriation of Haitian migrants, help create conditions in the capital for the anticipated arrival of the Multinational Interim Force authorized by U.N. Security Council Resolution 1529, and for other purposes consistent with Resolution 1529. Additional U.S. forces have since been deployed to Haiti, bringing the total of U.S. combat-equipped and combat-support forces in Haiti to approximately 1,800. It is possible that additional U.S. forces will be deployed to Haiti in the future; however, it is anticipated that U.S. forces will redeploy when the Multinational Interim Force has transitioned to a follow-on United Nations Stabilization Force.

I have directed the participation of U.S. Armed Forces in all of these operations pursuant to my constitutional authority to conduct U.S. foreign relations and as Commander in Chief and Chief Executive. Officials of my Administration and I communicate regularly with the leadership and other members of Congress with regard to these deployments, and we will continue to do so.

Sincerely,

George W. Bush

NOTE: Identical letters were sent to J. Dennis Hastert, Speaker of the House of Representatives, and Ted Stevens, President pro tempore of the Senate. This letter was released by the Office of the Press Secretary on March 22.

Remarks Following a Cabinet Meeting and an Exchange With Reporters

March 23, 2004

The President. Thank you all for coming. We've just had a very constructive Cabinet meeting. We talked about the need for us to remain strong in the war on terror. I assured our—my team that America is not going to blink in the face of the attacks that took place in Spain. As a matter of fact, we'll continue to rally the world to fight off terror.

Here at home, my economic advisers, economic team presented a very upbeat assessment about our economy. It's strong, and it's growing stronger. Inflation is low. Interest

rates are low. Manufacturing activity is up. The job base is growing. There's a lot of signs that the economic plan we put in place are working. There's more work to do.

In order to make sure the economy continues to grow, in order to fight off economic isolationism, we've got to work to control the cost of health care, which makes it awfully difficult for many small businesses to provide health care for their employees. We need an energy plan. The Secretary of Energy discussed the need for an energy plan. We need to make sure that we have legal reform. Junk and frivolous lawsuits make it awfully difficult for people to find work here in the United States. We need to make sure that the regulations at the Federal, State, and local level are absolutely necessary. And finally, we need to make sure the tax cuts are permanent. Tax relief has stimulated economic growth, and they need to be permanent. And I call upon Congress once again to, at the very least, make sure the child credit, the marriage penalty, and the 10-percent bracket are made permanent now so that people can plan—consumers can plan and small-business owners can plan.

But I'm pleased with the report I received. I'm pleased with the progress. There is more work to do. I look forward to working with Congress to get it done.

I'll answer two questions here today. Tom [Tom Raum, Associated Press], wherever you are.

Q. Mr. President, over here.

The President. Yes, right there.

Counterterrorism Efforts

Q. Mr. President, there's been a lot of attention over the last couple days to a book written by your former counterterrorism adviser that suggests that you understated the threat of Al Qaida before September 11th and then rushed to blame Iraq after the terror attacks. Is there any basis at all in any of these allegations? And do you agree with the Republican Senator Chuck Hagel that the White House needs to take these charges more seriously and not just undermine Mr. Clarke's credibility?

The President. Well, the facts are these: George Tenet briefed me on a regular basis about the terrorist threats to the United